

Ends of the Earth | Acts 28:16-31

As we come to the end of our year-long journey through the book of Acts, I've been thinking about how amazing it is that we've even been talking about this Jesus-movement that Acts tells of, here in our day in our time in 2025! That, as the story goes, somewhere around the year AD 30, a group of about 120 people inspired by all Jesus began to do and teach – and who now claimed Jesus was alive after his death on a cross – started a movement that is still inspiring our conversations and our lives some 2,000 years later!

And our journey through Acts has been a wild ride of a movement... From this original rag-tag group receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, supernaturally translating the good news of Jesus into foreign languages! To being so overwhelmed by the love of Jesus that they shared all they had and there was no need among them! To witnessing miraculous healings, to preserving through intense persecution, to seeing Gentiles and foreigners added to the family. To missionary journeys, to prison escapes, to unjust trials, to dangerous voyages, to shipwrecks and snake bites! All having started with ***“all that Jesus began to do and to teach”*** and through his promise that his followers would ultimately become his witnesses ***“to the ends of the earth.”*** And now, in the series finale of Acts, this is exactly what happens.

If you've tracked with the story for the past few weeks, you know that the Apostle Paul has been making his way to Rome – the centre of the known world at the time. But at this stage in the journey, doing so as a prisoner who had appealed to Caesar in the face unjust allegations and trials. And we pick up the story today in **Acts 28:16**, where it says:

When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Not knowing how long it would be until Paul would appear before Caesar, rather than being thrown into the local jail, given the non-threatening nature of Paul's charges – perhaps combined with the fact that his prophetic wisdom had just saved an entire Roman sailing crew – Paul was permitted to live in Rome in his own personal accommodations, but under the restriction of house arrest and with a 24/7 rotation of soldiers to guard him. Some commentators suggesting, most likely chained to Paul as he went about his business around the house.

And although Paul didn't have full freedom to move about the city, now that he was in Rome – the ultimate destination of where he sensed Jesus wanted him to be – he went right to work as he always did on his missionary journeys by getting together with the local Jewish leaders to tell them about the message and mission of Jesus. In **verses 17-20**, it says:

Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

As was his custom on arrival, Paul began his work of witnessing by wanting to share the hope of Jesus with his Jewish community as *the fulfillment* of their shared faith. Here, letting them know right of the bat that though the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were accusing Paul of somehow violating their long-held traditions, he wanted to make clear that his only claim was that Jesus was risen from the dead as their long awaited and hoped-for Messiah – their Saviour. And that because of his faith in Jesus as the one they had always hoped would come, that that was why he was now in chains under house arrest awaiting trial before Caesar in Rome.

Skipping down to **verses 23-24**, we hear of Paul then having his opportunity to tell them about Jesus. But also, how their response to this message turned out to be familiar to other responses Paul experienced on previous missionary journeys. In verse 23, it says:

They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.

Due to the undercurrent of curiosity about this house-arrested Pharisee-Turned-Jesus-Follower, along with the subversive reputation the Jesus-movement had garnered throughout the empire, large numbers from the Jewish community packed out the house Paul was staying in – chained guard and all – to hear Paul talk about Jesus. And that’s exactly what Paul did. It says, *“He witnessed from morning till evening.”* Meaning, like we heard a couple weeks ago, he told them his personal story – what *he* had *witnessed* in meeting Jesus. And then out of his story, he *“explained about the kingdom of God.”* He *taught* them about how Jesus was actually the fulfilment of all the kingdom dreams and prophecies they had ever heard, from both their *Law* and their *Prophets*. This is so significant because this is exactly what Jesus had begun to do and teach after his resurrection, when the same author, Luke, wrote about how the risen Jesus – unrecognized at first – helped two of his disciples come to see who he was by ***“beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)***

And as we come to the end of Acts, this was the work that Paul now *continued to the ends of the earth* in Rome – just as Jesus promised way back in Acts chapter 1 – and, as had become his pattern, starting by bringing the message of Jesus to his Jewish community.

But did you notice their response? It says in verse 24: “Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.” That, like the Jewish community in Thessalonica we learned about several weeks ago, even though Paul was now where Jesus promised his movement needed to and was going to go, he experienced, once again, only a “some” response from the Jewish leaders on hearing the good news of Jesus.

At the same time though, Paul knew he hadn’t made it to the “ends of the earth” just to share Jesus with his Jewish counterparts. Like every journey he had been on so far, Paul’s primary calling was to make sure this good news also made it to the Gentiles – to *all* the nations – so *they* also could be part of experiencing and bringing the good news and movement of Jesus to *their* ends of the earth.

It’s in that spirit that Acts ends, with Paul saying (**Acts 28:28-31**):

“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

End. Of. Story.

Friends, if you’re like me, on the one hand this is an *inspiring* ending to the book of Acts. That the message and mission of Jesus did in fact make it to the “ends of the earth” – symbolized by the city of Rome – through the work and witness of the Apostle Paul.

But frankly, on the other hand, it can also feel like an *incomplete* ending on at least two levels. First, that it leaves so much of the rest of the story untold. Like, what happened to Paul after those two years? Did he ever stand trial before Caesar? Who were the “all who came to see him” and where did they go? And how did the Jesus movement end up going from first-century Rome all the way to something we’re still talking about and inspired by today?

But then the second thing that can make it feel incomplete or confusing is that: This all happened under house arrest?!? I mean, sure Paul made it to the “ends of the earth” so-to-speak, but he was stuck at home and chained to a guard! And this ending to what had been an epic movement makes it sound like simply talking about Jesus with prison visitors over a cup of tea while a guard checks his watch is supposed to be the *make-it-to-the-ends-of-the-earth* world-changing climax of the story that Jesus promised and envisioned from the get-go!

And at the end of this series: What if that incompleteness is exactly the point?

First, that this story was only ever always meant “To Be Continued.” That like the unnamed visitors that Paul welcomed in these final verses of Acts, that anyone anywhere who would ever hear about the message and mission of Jesus was now invited to continue the story and to keep bringing this good news to *their* ends of the earth. And what if – even 2,000 years later – that includes you and me and us together today?

And to the second point, especially if the thought of bringing the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth can sound inspiring, but *intimidating* – well – according to Paul’s “ends of the earth” house arrest, it turns out that: ***Bringing the movement of Jesus to the ends of the earth starts right where you are.*** That while Paul might have had his own dreams of travelling throughout Rome and perhaps on to other stops in the empire to fulfill Jesus’s mission of being his witness to the ends of the earth, it turns out that all Jesus wanted for or needed from Paul was for him to share his message, mission, and love right where he was.

So friends, let me ask you: Where has God placed you? Because perhaps your ends-of-the-earth is closer than you think. Perhaps your ends-of-the-earth starts with whoever is sitting next to you today. Or that your ends-of-the-earth is the apartment next to yours. Or the neighbour on the other side of your fence. The co-worker across the hall.

The classmate in your study group. The teammate on your soccer team. The friend down the street. The resident who recently moved into our shelter. The Caribbean worker who rides their bike past your home. The friend at Harvest Kitchen eager for a conversation. The local Indigenous community who gathers at the Niagara Regional Native Centre.

To take it a step further – or maybe should I say even *closer*. According to Paul, the ends of the earth can even start as close as whoever is “chained” to you. (Spouses, don’t elbow each other just yet...) But seriously think about that. Who are you closest to, that at some level, you can’t really get away from – or who might not be able to get away from you? And what if Jesus wants to bring his message and mission of love to them through you? Are you sharing the life and love of Jesus with your spouse? With your kids? With your roommate? With your siblings? With your micromanaging boss? With your over-bearing in-laws? With your hard-to-work-with co-worker? Or hyper-competitive kid’s soccer coach?

Friends, what would it look like to intentionally look for opportunities to share the message and mission of Jesus with the people in our lives we’re so close to we can’t get away from? Because this is exactly what Paul did, and was likely the most significant way the Jesus movement kept moving throughout the ends of the earth, as he wrote to the Philippians during his time under house arrest, Paul said (**Philippians 1:12-13**):

I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.

That the guards who took their turns chained to Paul shift after shift and night after night were so close they had heard Paul’s witness and explanation of the good news of Jesus as much or more than anyone else that they were now not only well-versed in the message, but many were starting to become part of the movement, right under Caesar’s nose.

So where has God placed you? Or who in your life feels so close they're "chained" to you? And if we're invited to be part of a "to be continued" bringing of the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth, how will you be part of the movement right where you are?

Finally, and perhaps closest to home of all, I think the only way any of this is going to happen or keep happening in and through our lives and continuing to the ends of the earth is if we let it start right here... In our hearts. In our own lives today. You see, as some of the final words of the book of Acts that we skipped past earlier, in follow up to the "some" response of the Jewish community in Rome who believed in Jesus and the many "others" who did not, part of how Luke concludes the book of Acts is through the Apostle Paul sharing an important yet sober warning from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, saying:

"The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

***"Go to this people and say,
"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."
For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them."***

Acts 28:25-27

Friends, after 10 months journeying through the book of Acts together, learning of and leaning into the message, mission, and movement of Jesus, it turns out we have a choice at the end of the story: a choice about whether we'll let the rest of the story be told through us. That we have the choice to just *hear*. Or, *to truly listen*. To simply *see and observe* a good story. Or, *be transformed by it*. To let our hearts be hardened, calloused, and self-sufficient – not feeling a need to receive anything Jesus has to offer.

Or, to freely respond and receive the healing and saving and history-changing love of Jesus with hearts so overwhelmed with gratitude we can't help but continue sharing it with others right where we are!

So may we choose to be part of the story! To continue the story! To come to know and share the message and mission and movement of Jesus right where we are! And may all that Jesus began to do and teach – some 2,000 years ago – only continue in our hearts, in our homes, in our neighbourhoods, in our church, in our region – AND to the ends of the earth!

Let's pray...